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SUBJECT: WORKER RIGHTS IN QATAR: NOT JUST A PROBLEM FOR
LABORERS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Qatar's economy is booming and has become heavily reliant on expatriate workers. The resulting influx of foreign workers, currently estimated at nearly 90 percent of the population, has caused the Government of Qatar to take sometimes stringent measures to ensure that the large expatriate community does not consume the small citizen population. This is often seen most vividly in expatriate workers rights and immigration and sponsorship regulations, including for mid-level and highly-skilled employees. "Qatarization" (the process of ensuring that Qatari citizens receive employment) has been expanded from the public to the private sector and affects mainly educated expatriates. Immigration officials keep a close eye on the number of migrant workers emanating from any one country, and certain nationalities, particularly Palestinians, Jordanians, Pakistanis, and Iranians, experience the greatest difficulties and are often deported when the worker attempts to change jobs and sponsors. Current Qatari law allows the Ministry of Interior to restrict and deport foreign workers "in the public interest" without legal recourse. The following are examples of this practice. END SUMMARY.

You're Fired, and We Won't Tell You Why

¶2. (SBU) British National Brian Connor described to P/E Chief May 5 how he lost his job in April as head of security for the Qatar Museum Authority (QMA), a post he had held since August 2006. Connor, who previously served as head of security in London for an internationally recognized bank, returned from a two-week vacation in January to find an office e-mail announcing the name of the new security chief, Hamad Al-Kaabi. Connor speculated that the new chain of command was a result of "Qatarization," and he sought to make it work. Ultimately, the new arrangement did not work, and Human Resources informed Connor in April that QMA had decided to terminate Connor. To date, no official reason for Connor's dismissal has been given. The termination letter Connor received lists no reason for his dismissal in the appropriate blank.

¶3. (SBU) Connor speculated that he was dismissed because, after his demotion, he criticized improper security decisions that were made by his new boss, Al-Kaabi. Connor said Al-Kaabi had no previous security experience and previously worked at the Qatar Foundation (QF), which is headed by the consort of the Amir, Sheikha Mozah. The daughter of the Amir and Sheikha Mozah, Sheikha Mayassa, heads the QMA. Connor said following his demotion in January, QMA circulated a new written policy prohibiting contact with Sheikha Mayassa without his authorization. About the same time, Connor's new boss - Al-Kaabi - instructed Connor not to take any decisions

without his approval. Not long after a scheduled vacation, Connor returned to find a dismissal notice. Connor said he had no axe to grind with the QMA, especially since QMA gave him a generous severance package and Connor has other job prospects in the region.

14. (SBU) Nonetheless, Connor maintained that Qatarization was hurting Qatari interests. He said Qatari employees, such as his former supervisor, were being hired with no regard to their qualifications. The Qataris, with whom he had worked, especially men, worked shorter hours than required and were often unqualified for the jobs they held. Their performance was also often substandard. The effect on expatriate employees, Connor said, was debilitating. In April alone, 15 expatriates submitted their resignation at QMA, and another eight were terminated. The remaining expatriates, who worked hard and were the most productive employees, feared that they would be next, observed Connor. Connor concluded that it will be very difficult for Qatar to achieve its ambitious plans so long as incompetence is rewarded and bad news is not conveyed to the top.

Job Mobility? Don't Try It!

15. (SBU) Omer (last name withheld) is an American citizen who had been employed for four years in a private company as an Information Technology Manager and recently received a job offer for a better position as a Systems Analyst at the Aspire Sports Academy, a quasi-governmental institution. He received a no-objection certificate (NOC) from his current

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employer, the GAC Group, as requested by the Aspire Academy. (Note: A NOC is a legal requirement that begins the process of transferring sponsorship from one employer to another.) He submitted his paperwork to the Immigration Department at Aspire, which then submitted it to the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Omer was notified three weeks later by Aspire that his application for visa transfer had been rejected and that they could no longer offer him the position. A day later, the Immigration Department called and asked him to come to their office. He was then informed that he had received an order of deportation because his visa application had been rejected. His passport was held and he was given two weeks to leave the country.

16. (SBU) POL Specialist suggested that Omer go to the Qatar National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and meet with the Chairman, Dr. Khalid Al-Attiya. After explaining the situation, Al-Attiya told him the cause of the problem was Qatarization of the government and semi-government sectors and he suggested that he obtain a letter from Aspire saying that the position could not be filled by a Qatari citizen in order for the NHRC to advocate his case. Aspire declined to issue the letter.

17. (SBU) Omer kept wondering why he was not informed by either his prospective or previous employer that changing his workplace could risk his deportation. Furthermore, Omer was not told why he was being deported, except that it was "for the public interest." According to Omer, he had not done anything wrong nor broken any laws.

18. (SBU) The Director of the Human Rights Department (HRD) at the MOI told POL Specialist that he would help Omer change his sponsorship if he could obtain another job offer in the private sector. Omer did so and provided all requested documents to the HRD. After two months, his application was again rejected by the MOI and his deportation order stands. Omer told us he was concerned that being deported from Qatar would greatly damage his reputation and career opportunities elsewhere.

¶9. (SBU) In 2005, an Embassy locally engaged staff employee applied at QF to work at one of the new U.S. universities in Education City. On his behalf, the Embassy RSO called the MOI before the employee began the application process to ensure that he would not be deported because he wished to transfer sponsorship, which had too often been the case with other requests. The MOI replied by saying that he had a clean record and there would be no problem transferring his sponsorship to QF. He sent his resume and, after a successful interview, was given an offer which he accepted. The applicant then received the required NOC from the Embassy to transfer his sponsorship. QF signed its acceptance on the sponsorship application form. The QF Immigration Officer then took the paperwork to the MOI. A major requirement in changing sponsorship is that the applicant must receive a police certificate of good conduct, which usually takes 15 days. In this case, it took almost two months before QF received word from the Immigration Department at the MOI that the job should be occupied by a Qatari citizen because QF is a quasi-governmental organization; hence the application had been rejected. (Note: The police certificate has not been received to date.) It is noteworthy that the employee, of Palestinian origin, was born and spent his entire life in Qatar.

¶10. (SBU) In 2008, the same employee applied to a Western firm in the private sector and faced the same problem. After applying for a position and receiving a job offer, he was not issued a police certificate. When he inquired why, he was told only that he could not work for this particular employer. When his prospective employer followed up with the MOI, the employer was told that a person of the employee's nationality could not be offered such an elevated job title or high salary.

Citizenship - Now You See it, Now You Don't!

¶11. (SBU) Abeer Al-Tamimi, a naturalized Qatari citizen of
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Jordanian origin, was working at the Supreme Council for Family Affairs as a Youth Programs Officer and a writer for Al-Sharq newspaper. Abeer contacted the Embassy in March to complain that the MOI had stripped her and her two children of their Qatari citizenship. Abeer had acquired her Qatari citizenship through marriage in 1993 to her ex-husband, who was also of Jordanian origin. Their two children acquired citizenship through their father. All acquired citizenship in accordance with Qatari law. Abeer and her husband divorced in 2002.

¶12. (SBU) Abeer was contacted by the MOI Immigration Department in 2003 and was told to renounce her Jordanian nationality or her Qatari nationality would be withdrawn, since dual citizenship is contrary to Qatari law. Abeer traveled to Jordan in compliance with the order and renounced her Jordanian citizenship.

¶13. (SBU) Abeer's ex-husband's Qatari citizenship was stripped in July 2007. Abeer told us she did not know why his citizenship was revoked. The citizenship of Abeer and her two children were likewise revoked. Because her two children were vacationing in Jordan at the time, their Qatari passports were confiscated by officials at the Qatari Embassy in Amman, while Abeer's was confiscated in Doha. She has not seen her children since.

¶14. (SBU) Abeer was told by officials at the MOI that she and her children were facing deportation or detention at the Deportation Detention Center if she did not legalize her residency in Qatar based on her previous Jordanian

nationality. When she attempted to reclaim her Jordanian citizenship through the Jordanian Embassy in Doha, Embassy officials confiscated her previous passport, which had expired in 1994, and presented her with a copy of the Royal Decision that declared that she had relinquished her right to Jordanian citizenship. The decision not to take the case further was frustrated by the fact that Abeer is of Palestinian origin.

¶15. (SBU) Abeer was told by Qatari authorities that she was being deported because her ex-husband, who had also been stripped of his Qatari citizenship, was being deported in June. The two had been divorced since 2002 and she was not made aware why her ex-husband was being deported. According to Qatari law, the two were married and living together more than the requisite period for her to claim permanent citizenship. Also according to Qatari law, the children acquired citizenship at birth. Unfortunately, however, also according to the law, the Minister of Interior may administratively strip the citizenship of naturalized citizens when such acts are "in the public interest" of the State.

¶16. (SBU) Since the American Embassy could not intervene in Abeer's case; she was referred to the NHRC. After investigating and communicating with the MOI, the NHRC told Abeer that there was nothing they could do for her.

No Legal Recourse

¶17. (U) An Administrative Court was established in 2007 to hear cases involving intra-governmental disputes and administrative decrees. According to Article 3 of the law, however, "Emiri orders, decisions and decrees; decrees based on Society Protection Law No. (17) for the year 2002; decrees based on the laws of private societies and foundations, publications; release; licenses for issuing newspapers and magazines; licenses for firearms, ammunition and explosives; entry, exit and repatriation of expatriates; and expropriation for public interest" are all exempt from review by the court. There are no legal remedies for the described cases.

Comment

¶18. (SBU) This is a sampling of cases which Embassy Doha is aware. Even in cases involving American citizens, it is difficult to advocate on their behalf, since Qatari authorities are acting in accordance with current Qatari law. We nonetheless continue to press for legal and immigration

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reforms in our annual Human Rights Report and in our diplomatic engagements with Qatari stakeholders.
RATNEY